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METHYL ALCOHOL.

RECENT LEGISLATION TO RESTRICT ITS SALE AND USE.

By MARTIN I. WILBERT, Technical Assistant, Division of Pharmacology, Hygienic Laboratory, United States Public Health Service.

The harmful influences of wood alcohol are so well known that specific legislation designed to restrict the use of this drug in connection with medicinal articles would appear almost superfluous. Unfortunately, current literature records many cases of serious poisoning due to the inadvertent use of mixtures containing wood alcohol in the form of a medicine, a paint product, or as a substitute for ethyl alcohol as a beverage. A recent editorial (J. Am. M. Assoc. 1914, v. 62, p. 538) states that nearly one thousand cases of poisoning attributed to wood alcohol have been reported in the literature since 1893, the date which marks the advent of methyl alcohol of a high grade of purity like that sold under the trade names of "Columbian Spirits," "Manhattan Spirits," "Pro Spirit," etc. The publicity given to these facts has again directed attention to the need for further restricting the use of wood alcohol.

The constant recurrence of cases of wood-alcohol poisoning has also served to arouse considerable uneasiness in the industries connected with its manufacture. The manufacture of wood alcohol is said to involve the annual production and use of about 10,000,000 gallons of the substance, with a capital investment in this country of about \$12,000,000 and an industry which employs over 3,000 workingmen. There are at present 63 manufacturers of wood alcohol in the United States. In these plants the workmen are generally less liable to come into contact with the vapor than are workmen, such as painters, who use solutions made with wood alcohol in confined, poorly ventilated rooms or tanks.

Wood alcohol presents a unique case for legislation not only because of its general resemblance to ethyl alcohol, but especially on account of the word "alcohol," which, while it has a definite meaning to the chemist, is rather associated in the lay mind with "drink."

The National Association of Retail Druggists at the meeting held in 1915 adopted the following resolution:

Resolved. That we go on record as opposed to the use of wood alcohol in medicinal preparations to be used by human beings, and favor such labeling of wood alcohol as will protect the public against its harmful use.

During the year 1915 two States, New Hampshire and South Dakota, each enacted a law restricting the sale of methyl alcohol and prescribing a form of label to be used. The South Dakota law

makes it unlawful to possess, sell, or distribute food or drink or any medicinal or toilet preparation intended for human use, internally or externally, which contains methyl or wood alcohol, either crude or refined, under or by whatever name or trade-mark the same may be called or known. Regulations or ordinances restricting the sale and use of methyl alcohol have been adopted in the city of Chicago, the city of New York, and the city of Montclair, N. J.

COMMUNITY SICKNESS SURVEY.

ROCHESTER, N. Y., SEPTEMBER, 1915.

By LEE K. FRANKEL, Ph. D., Sixth Vice President, and LOUIS I. DUBLIN, Ph. D., Statistician, Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., New York.

An unemployment survey made by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. in conjunction with the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the Federal Government, during 1915, and covering over a million wage earners in selected cities of the United States, developed the interesting fact that 11 per cent of the unemployment was caused by sickness or accident disability. Over 1 per cent (1.2) of all the wage earners canvassed were unemployed on account of illness. The figure varied somewhat from city to city. The maximum was in Duluth, where 2.4 per cent of all wage earners were unemployed because of illness; the minimum was in Milwaukee, where 0.8 per cent were so unemployed.

These facts, together with a desire to measure approximately the amount of illness prevailing in American communities, have led the executives of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. to institute a plan to determine the amount of sickness, similar to that utilized in surveying unemployment. As in the latter investigation, the company availed itself of the services of its field organization, and the city of Rochester was chosen as the community in which the initial survey was to be undertaken. The company's agency staff in Rochester was addressed and carefully instructed in the details of recording the required items of information on the following schedule: